This is the full-text transcript of an audio podcast, recorded over two sessions, with Nick Land. Several people contributed to the transcription effort, including Uriel Fiori, Luana Salles, Akira, Gullfire, and Nishiki.

Part 1: Acceleration, Ideology, Intelligence, Religion

Justin Murphy: *You're basically one of the leading thinkers, I would say arguably the leading thinker, of what we might call the school of thought that's known as accelerationism. Accelerationism is something like the view that contemporary history is changing at an exponential rate, technologically and economically, and that this rate of change confounds nearly all of our traditional concepts for thinking about society and economics and politics. That's just for people who have no idea what we're going to be talking about, that's broadly the school of thought you are known for and associated with, so maybe just before we even move forward (that's my short, "elevator pitch" as it were), would you add anything to that? If someone on the street walked up to you and asked you "What is this whole accelerationism thing?" Is there a kind of essence or key upshot that you would add to what I just said?*

Nick Land: We're going to have this conversation so, you know, it's probably … to try and anticipate might be a mistake, and I think as we start talking about it, we will find ourselves in various dimensions of accelerationism. In terms of my own involvement in it, I would say the guiding term, for certainly a long time, was cybernetics. The basic accelerationist thesis is that modernity is dominated by positive feedback processes rather than negative feedback processes, and the first wave of cybernetic theory — which consistently normalized negative homeostatic feedback and pathologized positive feedback — was therefore self-obsolescent. It was something that was not going to be a sustainable stance, given the — as you say — basic accelerating trend of the modern process, most extremely in its technological and economic dimensions. So that's the "off the shelf" conceptual vocabulary that I think, at least initially, it comes in with, but it is itself extremely dynamic. And we've seen, an astounding range of different systems and terms of reference get sucked into this accelerationism conversation.

Justin Murphy: *I've always been extremely curious about the relationship between your earlier work and your current thinking on these matters. A lot of your early work from the 1990s, it tends to embrace a fairly radical and even emancipatory political tone, I think it's fair to say … it's very kind of insurrectionary anarchist. There are a lot of feminist connotations. It's very cyberpunk, obviously.*

It's all about theorizing rebellion in the new digital context. Things like "hacking the macropod" and exploiting glitches in what you call the "human security system", these sorts of notions … You talk about "k-war," which I interpret as like revolutionary guerrilla warfare but on the level of the social codes. You're even interested in more fantastic ideas such as stuff like "neolemurian time-war" in which one gets the sense that your position then seems to have been that these sorts of accelerationist insights might allow rebellious individuals and groups to fundamentally alter or hack the nature of social reality in ways that the status quo institutions are not able to defend against … There's this very heady, emancipatory kind of tone to all of it, and so a lot of people who are interested in your work and your ideas, got into it through these early texts, and I think we know it's very clear that since then, your thinking has evolved drastically, but what's unclear I think is how and why exactly your thinking has changed or just how to understand the trajectory between those early heady, emancipatory connotations and your current viewpoints. So before even going into your current views and picking your brain about how you see these things today, I'm just curious if you could kind of mentally go back to the 1990s, when you're theorizing all these kinds of radical ideas at the beginning. What was the first crack in that tendency for you? Like what gave, exactly? Was there a particular realization or insight or problem or anomaly in your viewpoint in the 90s that kind of cracked and made you see that all of these radical emancipatory ideas are not going to work, or how would you explain that?

Nick Land: These things come in waves. Wave motion is crucial to this. There was an extremely exciting wave that was ridden by the Ccru in the early to mid-1990s. You know, the internet basically arrived in those years, there were all kinds of things going on culturally and technologically and economically that were extremely exciting and that just carried this accelerationist current and made it extremely, immediately plausible and convincing to people. Outrageous perhaps, but definitely convincing. It was followed — and I wouldn't want to put specific dates on this, really — but I think there was an epoch of deep disillusionment. I'd call it the Facebook era, and obviously, for anyone who's coming in any way out of Deleuze and Guattari, for something called "Facebook" to be the dominant representative of cyberspace is just almost, you know, a comically horrible thing to happen! [Laughs.]

I just really responded to this with such utter, prolonged disgust that a certain deep, sedimentary layer of profound grumpiness — from a personal point of view — was added to this. But I don't think it's just a personal thing. I think that accelerationism just went into massive eclipse …

Justin Murphy: *To me, what's really at stake in this question is the nature of ideology — that's one*

of the things I'm really interested in today — just what, exactly, is ideology? What is the most empirically sophisticated way to understand social communities' tendencies to divide along ideological dimensions, the number of those dimensions, the relationship between those dimensions … I find it very fascinating and important because I think those are the tracks along which so much of the contemporary mass insanity and confusion go down … It almost seems to me like you — listening to you describe your own trajectory — it almost sounds like you're endorsing a horseshoe theory of ideology, this idea that the radical left at a certain margin almost has to become right-wing to some degree? That seems to be kind of baked into what you've said about Deleuze and Guattari's perspective on accelerationism, that the real way to rebel against capitalism is, in some sense, to be so capitalist that capitalism can't handle it? Is that how you see it?

Nick Land: Actually, that's not really how I see it, but I think it is an interesting suggestion and I think you're touching upon this really fascinating and intricate zone in making that suggestion, for sure.

Justin Murphy: *So what's wrong with that, to you?*

Nick Land: Before trying to respond precisely to that, let me just say that there is a fabric of discussion, obviously very connected to your point, which comes from the fact that (precisely because of this surreptitious, insidious strategy that Deleuze and Guattari use, I'm going to use them as the epitome of this thing that we're involved in), the fact that that strategy has resulted in a question that has haunted accelerationism from its birth, which is precisely this "Is it a left-wing or right-wing process?" thing — that we've seen people exploring in stages later. The original leftist formulation of it was very different from anything that we get in what then becomes called left-accelerationism later. It's almost like Lenin's "the worse, the better". The understanding of it is that, you know, what Deleuze and Guattari are doing, what the accelerationist current coming out of them is doing, is saying the way to destroy capitalism is to accelerate it to its limit. There's no other strategy that has any chance of being successful.

Now, then, there's a question, can we model what is being said there as a horseshoe? There is a certain kind of possible meeting point of hyper-rightists, proponents of capitalism, and hyper-leftists, defined as ferocious antagonists of capital. Yes, I will grant you, in that construction, that's not implausible, that's not impossible. And I think we do see these interesting crossovers. Obviously, one figure that is on the edge of this and of great interest to lots of people working in accelerationism-related areas is this guy who goes by the nick of Damn Jehu (if I'm pronouncing

that right, I don't know). He's as absolute, fundamentalist Marxist as anyone I've ever come across. Absolutely fundamental anti-capitalist, proletarian-revolution economistic Marxist, and yet there's a huge zone of resonance between his analysis and accelerationist currents, that could be seen as absolutely, offensively and unambiguously rightist in orientation. There's something serious behind what you're saying, it's not like there's nothing there, but I have to put my fourth point on the table, which will bounce back onto this question, which is the right-accelerationist commitment (that feeds into all kinds of later things but definitely is something already going on in the 1990s), that the actual, practical, social force of conservatism — all of what would be called "reaction" — is the political left. The political left is the thing that is set essentially against the imperative to accelerate the process.

By that definition of leftism, it's really that — I can say this as soon as I'm not within a certain strategic context set by the the academy, but I think it's not just the academy, it's a structure of political and ideological hegemony — that it's just misleading to really present this as a leftist project at all, you're so against the basic grain, the basic impulsive imperatives of the left to say that, that it's just … sure, you'll do it for strategic reasons but then, when you're no longer under that pressure, why would you? Why would accelerationism maintain some kind of affinity or affection for the left as a position, when it is in a position to come clean on the situation and just say, "Look, what the left is, is the counter-movement, it's the opposition to the accelerationist process" … and that's where I say it's not really a horseshoe. It's only a horseshoe if you continue to define the left in terms that don't actually make any sociological sense.

[15:50] Justin Murphy: *So if you think about the left and the right as both superficial, strategic, social, molar formations, then they're really kind of mutually reinforcing paranoiac simplifications, trying to deal with the unbearable anxieties of economic acceleration. If you try to do either one of them too seriously, you might find yourself popping out into the other one, but that's not for any deep meaningful reason but simply because they're both delusional or strategically simplified, ultimately disingenuous tracks along which contemporary society sends people down, or something like that?*

Nick Land: I think the terminology of left and right, for anyone like you who is fascinated by the question of ideology, it's completely indispensable. I totally see why people get dissatisfied with that language and say "We have to move beyond this" or "This terminology ceases to be useful" but I have a sense of its kind of extreme resilience. I don't see us ever stopping talking about the left and the right. It's always going to come back in, I call it the prime political dimension, there is a

basic dimension with left and right polarities that everyone returns to, after their wanderings and complications. And all kinds of ideological currents themselves have a strategic interest in either muddying the water or trying to get people to rethink what they mean.

But in the end, people come back to this basic dimension of ideological possibility and I think it is the one that captures the accelerationist tendency most clearly. On the right end of that is the extreme *laissez faire,* Manchester liberal, anarcho-capitalism kind of commitment to the maximum deregulation of the technological and economic process. And on the opposite extreme is a set of constituencies that seek in various ways to — polemically, I would say words like “impede” and “obstruct” and “constrain” and whatever, but I realize that’s just my rightism on display. And there are other ways of saying that, to regulate it or control it or to humanize it, I wouldn’t try and do a sufficiently sophisticated ideological Turing test on myself to try and get that right you know?

But I don’t think there’s any real … It’s not really questionable, which of those impulses is in play and I think that it’s on that dimension that so-called left-accelerationism is left, I mean, it’s left because it is basically in a position of deep skepticism about the capitalist process. It’s accelerationist only insofar as it thinks there is some other — I would say magical — source of acceleration that is going to be located somewhere outside that basic motor of modernity. They gesture towards the fact that things will somehow still be accelerating when you just chuck the actual motor of acceleration in the scrap. And I think that is the left.

Left-accelerationism is left in a way that is robust, that everyone will recognize, they definitely are in fact genuine leftists, they’re not playing games like that, and they catalyze, obviously, a right opposition as soon as they do that because they’re already [inaudible] the prime political dimension. They’re on the left pole of it, they’re in antagonism to, then, what is defining the right pole of that same spectrum.

Justin Murphy: *So it sounds like you would basically say that Deleuze and Guattari are not really leftists. They might be writing from a kind of leftist milieu, and they might have some, sort of, leftist connotations, but the core of their project is not leftist because … you think leftism is basically the position of trying to slow down the accelerator?*

Nick Land: Yes, I think that project is anti-leftist but smuggled-in — this insidious thing of subverting the Marxist tradition from inside. I think the Marxist tradition is easy to subvert from inside because the Marxist tradition is based upon an analysis of capitalism that has many very valuable aspects. And as soon as you’re doing that, then you are describing the motor of acceleration, and once you

then make the further move that Deleuze and Guattari do — and Marx obviously at times does, too — of actually embracing the kind of propulsion that that motor is is generating, then you're there. I mean, you've already crossed the line.

Justin Murphy: *OK. I think that clarifies things. That's interesting because you also said you think there are cyclical tendencies in ideological manifestations, you seemed to be referring to the possibility that in some times and places, to pursue a radically critical philosophy, you'll tend to find yourself on the left, but at other times and places that might be more of a right-wing manifestation. Is that what you meant?*

Nick Land: Yes. Well, nothing so articulate. But I think the question is extremely interesting. I'm not going to put a dogmatic response to that down. Sure. But I think the conversation could go down a huge, extremely interesting track, guided entirely by that question that you've just raised really, which would be, "Does the history of critique pass through these strange processes of ideological oscillation?" And I think there definitely does seem to be some indication of that.

There's a lot of work that has to be done to really bring out the pattern really rigorously and clearly, but I'm absolutely convinced that Marxism in its core of maximum theoretical potency is definitely a working of critique in its strict Kantian, technical philosophical sense. And obviously, at a certain point, that seemed to have obvious anti-capitalist implications and I think that, in Deleuze and Guattari's work that does flip, but it's also complicated because in a sense Deleuze and Guattari are only excavating something that is already happening in Marx. They're not really distancing themselves in any way from what Marx is doing, or even from his configuration of critique, they're simply elevating it to an unprecedented point of lucidity. So maybe what you're saying is that there is a kind of a subterranean rightist implication even in what seems to be, at a certain point in history, its absolute antithesis.

Justin Murphy: *Well, how about this? What if we step out of the the ideological question and … let me ask you a question embedded in some of this, but without the ideological fetters on. Specifically, I want to go back a little bit to all of these notions and ideas that you spent a lot of time theorizing — which I mentioned before, in the 90s. There's a lot of pretty concrete mechanisms or tactics, if you will, that you theorize in those early writings, ways that people can basically re-engineer our social reality — I referred to some of them before, I won't go over them again.*

But what I want to ask you is, has your empirical model of society changed in such a way that those

kind of tactical ideas of reengineering social reality — do you believe that they no longer work? Or that you were wrong to think that they worked? Or is it just that those tactical abilities that humans have to alter social reality, maybe you would maintain that those ideas still empirically describe real possibilities available to people but they're just not being pursued for idiosyncratic reasons, or what?

Nick Land: I think there are two dimension to this question, both are very interesting. On one level, there is a question of tactical — I'll just repeat your language — various types of tactical potential. But I want to just abstract them from any attribution of a subject, because that's what we're going to then get onto on the flip side of this, which complicates things. Now, if we can do that, on one side we're talking about the question of humanism, in its wider sense … Who is it who's doing this stuff?

In the way you formulated the question, it's very much like individuals or groups, conceived as agents, in a relatively conventional way, using or exploiting these tactical opportunities which therefore serve them as tools. You've got a clear teleological structure there. Coming along with that, therefore, you have a notion of political guidance at the level of these agents, where their individual collective is in some position of mastery over their tools or equipment or resources.

This second aspect is obviously much more complicated, though the first aspect [of tactical opportunities] … I would straightforwardly say: there's absolutely no need to withdraw from this. This is partly back to this whole Facebook … this Facebook slump is the negative of this, but I think we've come out into an absolutely incandescent, new phase of technological and economic possibility driven by this fundamental dynamic vector of the internet. The basic socio-historical conditions right now are every bit as exciting as anything that was around in the 1990s. Totally.

And I would obviously say these blockchain technologies, I mean, they were envisaged in some sort of extremely abstract philosophical sense in the 1990s, everyone thought (who was looking at these issues at all), everyone could see that what the internet was going to do was produce these distributed structures that escaped the kind of established structures of governance that would be, in some insurrectionary sense, apolitical. You look back at some of these early cypherpunk and crypto-anarchist writings — Tim May, people like that — and they catch a hell of a lot of this stuff and what it's going to do, and what it's going to mean, and people were seeing that in the late 1990s and then they lost it … the internet just looked like an extremely sad opportunity for this narcissistic implosion back into the most pathetic forms of subjectivity.

And then we've had an absolutely incredible resurgence of massively exciting processes in the last few years, the last decade, I don't know how you would date it exactly.

So that's all easily said. I haven't at all become skeptical about those kinds of processes. But where I've always been skeptical is with the structures of agency that are supposedly employing these things. The big … I'm sorry if I'm relapsing back into ideological terminology you're hoping to escape … my sense of just absolute distancing from the left is that I think it has a massive myth, a huge, massive, humanist myth about the fact that there are these human agents, they can be trusted in the final analysis to have sound political orientation, we should listen to them, we should trust their political judgments and instincts, and that all of these technological and economic resources properly belong in a state of teleological subordination beneath their political projects.

So you have this whole thing about "praxis is on top," and capitalism [chuckles] … To summarize it, the technological and economic materials are subordinated in principle; even before you have your revolutionary suppression of capitalism, you have a theoretical suppression because you're thinking of it as just a toolkit to be put in the hands of various kinds of human agents to pursue their projects. And as you've already said, that's not, for me, a new problem. I mean, all of this — that's the human security system! [Laughs.] I don't trust the human security system, it's not my friend … I'm not trying to empower it. I'm not … cheering it on. I don't want it to improve its position of mastery in any way. I don't see capitalism as its toy or tool, you know. My relation to that is just utterly antagonistic.

[33:30] Justin Murphy: *So basically, all of the stuff you were thinking about in the 90s, which had a very left-wing flavor or a very emancipatory kind of motivation or drive or connotation — or I don't know what exactly you want to call it — but these very emancipatory-seeming ideas that you're theorizing in the 90s... You actually have not disavowed them at all. And interestingly, you're kind of saying — if I hear you correctly — that you actually think they might be more salient now than ever, as we come out of this Web 1.0 or 2.0 slump. So that's very interesting that …*

Nick Land: Sorry, Justin, if I can just interrupt you for one minute, because again, this is two-sided … Yes, I nod along to everything you were just saying, but … the language of emancipation, it's fine with me, you know, but — *what* is being emancipated?

Already in the 1990s, my interest is in the emancipation of the means of production. I have zero commitment to emancipation in any way defined by our dominant political discourses. I'm not into emancipated human groups, an emancipated human species, who reaches species-being to

emancipate human individuals ... None of that to me is of the slightest interest, so in using this word of emancipation, sure, I will totally nod along to it *if* what is meant by that is *capital autonomization*. I don't think that's something that it *isn't* already there in the 1990s, but I'm no longer interested in playing weird academic games about this and pretending this is the same thing as what the left really means when they're talking about emancipation. I don't think it is. I think what the left means by emancipation is freedom *from* capital autonomization.

Justin Murphy: *I definitely see the conceptual landmines here ... The way that certain words here seem to have certain ideological affiliations you're very keen to be on guard against, so I think I understand you clearly. I guess where I'm coming from, though — and I think this is a really important point — is that for people who read your work, and read accelerationism, who are aware of this school of thought, there is a very popular kind of interpretation in which it's seen as, "Oh, accelerationism is that school of thought that says, basically, you should just accept the reality of capitalism and not only should you just accept the reality of capitalism, but you should more or less accept and even push forward its increasingly brutal tendencies". So that's obviously, for a lot of people, that's a non-starter, but the reason that I'm interested in the questions I'm asking right now is because I think that common way of seeing accelerationism is really, really misguided, because on the one level, there's everything you're saying about how, yes, accelerationism does mean the foreclosure of human agency and the subject, and the increasing autonomization of capital, and a lot of these things that in the popular imagination are associated with oppressive dynamics, but ... What I remain very interested in trying to understand, and also trying to explain and model, is that what a lot of people see as this kind of oppressive pessimistic horror show — and it sounds like you kind of play that up a little bit when you talk about things like horrorism (that's sort of a separate sideline) — but what I'm interested in is, actually, there is a different way of reading the same empirical phenomena.*

Yes it's dehumanizing, its capital autonomization, and yes, there will be really brutal consequences. But at the same time, if what you're really interested in is ... if you see the world through categories such as freedom and liberation and emancipation, and kind of escape from oppression, if that is how you see the world, well actually, the accelerationist perspective still has a lot for you to be interested in. There's still, in some sense, a lot for you to do. And you're right that I'm kind of lapsing into a humanistic language which is, you know, just an unfortunate convenience, and you're right you have to be careful to not kind of reproduce unnecessarily naive notions of the human subject.

But correctly understood, these processes of we might call "k-war" or "neolemurian time war" or hacking the human security system, all of these sorts of tactics that you very richly help people to see in your early texts, those are still there … And those are things that human beings who feel oppressed today can do. And maybe it's not the naive human subject that's going to be doing that, maybe it's actually going to be a kind of tearing asunder of the human subject in the very act of doing it. But my point is simply, and this is what I wonder if you agree with, that whatever that *is, it's as close as we can get as human beings to what some of us have been calling "freedom" or "emancipation" or "liberation", that there are still things we can do in this accelerationist paradigm, that are a lot like what people had in mind whenever they they've talked about liberation and freedom.*

That's kind of the really important upshot from the accelerationist worldview that I am extremely interested in and am actively pursuing, and I find it very … I do find it liberating! I find it actually energizing and propelling in a way that I consider to be emancipatory, and I think there's a lot of research to be done on how to do those things and how to work those things out. But a lot of people can't see that because they think this whole accelerationism thing is just a kind of reactionary capitulation to everything that they see as being terrible and oppressive. Does that make sense, I wonder?

Nick Land: Yes, that whole thing … I think it's an extremely rich field, as you know because of your deep involvement in it. The accelerationist landscape right now is absolutely extraordinary, in terms of the incredible stuff people are doing. There's a whole flourishing of just fantastic accelerationist resources and blogs and discussions and … it's never remotely been in this state of flourishing and the kind of questions that you're raising just there are very much integral to that, and being thrashed out very much by all kinds of people within these different interlocking, interacting strains of accelerationist theories. So for sure, that conversation, it's not only that it's interesting and to be encouraged, but I think it's probably absolutely inevitable and something that we can just confidently predict is going to be one of these explosive dynamics.

I would tend to put myself, predictably [laughs], on the dark side of that whole ecology of discussion, because it just comes back to this question about humanism, the human animal, its ideological self-aggrandizement, and what is going on in that. I guess I'm sort of drifting somewhere very close to agreement with you, in saying something like, true emancipation, as something that is intensely and really produced, corresponds strictly to a process of dehumanization. Yeah, that would be the way I would put it, in trying to be in maximum resonance with what I took you to be

saying.

Justin Murphy: *OK well, I think that's actually a really nice and relatively neat way to wrap up that segment of the conversation then. Maybe we should not beat a dead horse as it were, and move on a little bit.*

Nick Land: Without wanting to seize the steering wheel, it seems to me like this is a really good place to go into the artificial intelligence discussion. The kind of problems and questions you were just raising are obviously extremely pertinent, in that, again, that huge field that I think intersects with accelerationism in a huge way, and is precisely haunted by the same kind of terrors of oppression … of whatever is mapped under this umbrella term of unfriendly AI, which is an update on a lot of the old terrors of what capitalism is delivering for us, and obviously again cuts across all these questions about agency in human identity, the definition of intelligence and subjectivity … So right there, already at this stage in the discussion …

[45:10] Justin Murphy: *Sure. Is there a particular point about AI that you think feeds in directly to what we were just talking about?*

Nick Land: Well, if I can just backtrack a tiny bit. I think there's one point about the AI landscape that we reached right at the beginning of this whole discussion, which is that the model of intelligence explosion as it comes out of the more rigorous but still speculative side of the artificial intelligence world — I'm thinking particularly of this amazing essay by I.J. Good, I'm gonna forget the name now, I won't try and recall it [Speculations Concerning the First Ultraintelligent Machine], but he launches the term intelligence explosion in that essay. It's an extremely good fit for the kind of core commitment of accelerationism, and intelligence explosion is the name for the thing that accelerationism is looking at. This notion is obviously controversial within the whole AI discussion. I don't think anyone would doubt its importance, but there are definitely people who have questioned its possibility. I think accelerationism finds itself committed automatically on one side of those internal debates around intelligence explosion.

Justin Murphy: *There's a popular image of the intelligence explosion, in particular the possibility of catastrophic failure modes in which, basically, superintelligence … one fine day in the near future … something clicks into place and suddenly there's a kind of rapid take off. That's, I think, a picture that has been put into a lot of people's minds, in large part through Nick Bostrom's influential book. He outlines a bunch of possible pathways, but now when people think of really catastrophic possibilities, this is something that commonly comes to mind, and something that I think about a lot*

is the connection to your work. You know, I'm very skeptical to be honest, of that picture of the situation, because I think if you look at capitalism in the kind of light that you do, if you see capitalism as this kind of pan-historical, almost substrate of reality itself, as kind of cybernetic, capitalism is almost in the nature of things, in your model. Correct me if you see it differently, but that's kind of how I read you.

If you think of intelligence as this — how should I put this? — it's almost like you see all of human history as a kind of intelligence explosion and that capitalism as we know it is already this long-term, explosive historical process. And so it's always seemed to me that the very catastrophic, malignant failure modes of superintelligence — I take them very seriously — it seems to me like it's already happening in the form of capitalism. There's a lot of reason to read your work as saying that, but I'm not sure if you agree with that or not. What do you think?

Nick Land: I think it comes down, again, just to these very, very basic cybernetic diagrams to do with positive feedback. And one sort of image — it's an entirely satisfactory image once it's accepted that it is figurative — is a critical nuclear reaction. You have a pile of radioactive rods that are damped down by graphite containment rods, and you start pulling out those graphite rods, and at a certain point it goes critical and you get an explosion. It's just absolutely — it's not a metaphor — it's a positive feedback process [laughs]. It just *is* a positive feedback process that passes through some threshold and goes critical. And so I would say that's the sense [in which] capitalism has always been there. It's always been there as a pile with the potential to go critical, but it didn't go critical until the Renaissance, until the dawn of modernity, when, for reasons that are interesting, enough graphite rods get pulled out and the thing becomes this self-sustaining, explosive process.

So in a certain sense, a lot of the actual fabric, the social historical fabric, is actually a containment system. And I think that containment system had a failure mode in the Renaissance. Just to dip back into the hyper-ideological space for a minute, what the extreme kind of what I call "paleo-reactionaries" get right is that they they totally see that. I share nothing of their mournful affection for the medieval period, but I think they're totally right to say that there was a catastrophic failure that unleashed this explosive process, and that is what modernity is from the perspective of the Ancien Régime. What any social system is *for* is to stop this nuclear pile going off. You look at Chinese civilization and you say, well, what is it really doing? What's it for? From a certain perspective, it's a capitalism containment structure that obviously worked better in this traditionalist sense than the European one. The European one was too fractured, it was subject to a

whole bunch of wild, uncontrollable influences, and unprecedented feedback structures kicked off that no one was in a position to master in Europe.

And so we get capitalism and modernity in Europe, and capitalism and modernity is brought to China by Western gunboats. It's not like they're bringing a gift, what they're bringing is ... they're coming to pull the [laughs] graphite containment roads out, you know, from outside. That's what that process of Chinese modernization is. It's a process of the indigenous Chinese process of containment being dismantled from outside until it then — obviously in a way that is no less spectacular than the one we've seen in the West — goes into this self-sustaining modernist eruption basically in the early 1980s.

Justin Murphy: *I really like your vivid metaphor of the radioactive rods and the containment system. I think that really helps someone picture what's at stake. Is this all to say that, do you think all of the people today who are talking about "AI alignment" — the people that are trying to ensure that, if and when there's a superintelligence take-off, that it won't be catastrophic — do you view those efforts as doomed?*

Nick Land: Yes. Catastrophic, obviously, is a word that's going to wander all over the place. And I'm a massive critic of the most popular catastrophist models epitomized by, I think, honestly, this pitifully idiotic paperclip model that was popularized by Yudkowsky, that Bostrom is still attached to, that you know, is very, very widespread in the literature, and I think, for reasons that maybe we can go into at some point, is just fundamentally mistaken. So that notion of catastrophe — as something very stupid happening as a result of an intelligence explosion — I find deeply implausible. But catastrophic in a technical sense, as it's used in catastrophe theory — there being some trigger point we enter into as a self-feeding positive dynamic — is absolutely right.

This is all about the history of capitalism. But that doesn't mean that we're not talking about catastrophic failure modes; on the contrary, it's precisely *why* we're talking about catastrophic failure modes, because we've seen, in the case of modernity, that that is what happens. That's what liberation looks like: pulling out enough of the containment structure that this new, self-feeding dynamic process erupts.

There are these reactionary voices that say that when liberals talk about liberalism, they're really talking about some kind of disaster. I don't think that's a trivial or stupid thing to say. There's obviously room for very different sets of evaluative responses around that, but there's a thought there that is actually profoundly realistic — and one I definitely think is more realistic than the kind

of facile liberalism that says “everything just gets better and better and better”. That perspective from which things are getting better is just deeply artificial and constructed. It doesn’t correspond to any real agents. The real, significant agents are the guys who are running the containment structure. The weak spin on that is deeply disingenuous.

Justin Murphy: *One thing I’m thinking about is how you read this problem of intelligence explosion — say, the difference between Nick Bostrom’s book and the larger historical narrative that you get from your writings. The difference is really significant in terms of cosmology. It’s a fundamentally different picture of what human society and human history is — and in some sense, the history of the universe. Everything people like Bostrom are highlighting right now has been a possibility baked into the nature of reality. It’s basically the cybernetic substrate of the evolution of everything that we’ve ever known. So long as there have been intelligent processes, there has been the spectre of positive feedback of intelligent processes that take off and leave behind all carbon-based deadweights. All of this gets strangely close to traditional religious worldviews. Have you ever noticed that, or have you ever thought about that?*

Nick Land: The fact that people now are seeing more and more of what is happening in terms of religious lineages is hugely important in its cold realistic development. So yes, absolutely. This has been a huge thing I’ve seen really in the last decade; this massive, massive explosion of saying, “Hey, look at this, isn’t this just actually intelligible within a particular religious lineage?”

[59:25] Justin Murphy: *The very frontiers of science, the very frontiers of philosophy, even the very frontiers of the radical, critical, anti-institutional sorts of projects, and traditional religious worldviews, they’re all converging in a shared underlying model of reality. We are rapidly — and more rapidly than ever — approaching a limit, and we don’t know what’s behind that wall, but whatever it is was something there from the beginning. You talk a lot about how, on some level, you can’t really justify talking about the past causing the future, and that on some level of abstraction you can just as well say that the future causes the past. All of this stuff about intelligence is making us take these ideas increasingly seriously — people like Bostrom and lots of others who take very seriously the simulation argument, the possibility that perhaps everything we know has some sort of creator. In other words, they’re all of these very, very strange loops in which the most hardcore rationalist line of thought seems to converge with very traditional models of the world. In some sense, I think early pre-modern human beings always had a sense that our ability to intelligently exploit the environment was going to end really badly.*

Nick Land: To regress a little bit in our discussion, one of the things that is coming into crisis is our sense of the relationship between humanity and intelligence. There is a certain way that that couple became very thoroughly soldered together, even in places where it seemed unlikely. For instance, for certainly popular modes of theology, the notion of a supreme cosmic intelligence as a deity is accompanied by this massive anthropomorphization of what that being will be like. There are all these resonances between god and man that cement this notion that there is some profound relationship between the anthropomorphic and the intelligent. This structure has been really badly pulled apart by modernity and has been coming to shreds, and people have obviously seen that happening long ago.

The discussions that are happening around artificial intelligence are deeply connected with that. The notion of friendly AI, for instance: I'm not saying it's reducible to a kind of new, synthetic anthropomorphic model of intelligence, but it's not completely separate either. It's anthropomorphic pretty much to the same degree as theologies have been.

A sophisticated theologian will say it's only the vulgar, low-grade versions of religious tradition that actually anthropomorphize superhuman intelligences — in the same way that someone in AI will say it's only a vulgarization to think that they're anthropomorphizing this notion of a friendly AI. But in both cases, the anthropomorphization is actually the predominant cultural phenomenon. There's a fringe of sophistication that can, with some credibility, say it's not fallen into that culture.

I'm sure you're familiar with the utterly brilliant remark by Elon Musk where he says that it would be unfortunate if the human species was to turn out to be the biological bootloader for artificial intelligence. There's a huge amount going on in there. All of our terrors are going on in there, that notion of what a catastrophic failure in this domain is going to be like. But also, what you see happening here is this rending of the fusion of humanity and intelligence where suddenly you begin to think — and a lot of people are — that actually, we're not abstract intelligence. Our intelligence is supposed to be instrumental in relation to our humanity. We are a specific biological species with a set of interests that are determined in terms of species preservation, not in terms of intelligence optimisation. Maybe intelligence optimisation collides in an extremely vicious way with our biological species' interest in terms of human self-preservation, whether as something recognisably human — whatever that means — or even as a carbon-based life form, or as something whose basic mode of reproduction passes through the DNA molecule. All of these things are open to a whole variety of extreme scenarios.

But it makes perfect sense for someone to say, “What science is telling me is that I am a transmission device for a hereditary piece of DNA code. And that’s where my interests lie. I don’t have any interest at all in the optimisation of intelligence insofar as it’s going to move the whole reproduction of complex chemistry on this planet onto a new reproductive substrate.” That’s extinction; that’s a disaster. But it’s a disaster that could still be intelligence-optimizing — a disaster that could still be, in cold, neutral terms, the most glorious thing that has yet happened in planetary history. It’s entirely compatible that this could be totally consistent with the worst nightmare in our biological history as a species.

Justin Murphy: *Again, it’s all extremely religious because it could very well be that the greatest catastrophe of the species is also the saving grace and the greatest glory of the species. These are all notions that are embedded in the world’s religions — at a low resolution, for sure. But we’re constantly falling back onto this vocabulary that it seems like there’s something else doing the work that’s not human agency.*

When you think about how unfashionable religion is in the West, I find a symptom there. There’s something symptomatic going on there that might be a bit of a clue as to the mass ideological insanity that is wreaking havoc on the public sphere today. Rationalism is obviously the order of the day; it’s the order of modernity. On the one hand, it seems like if we have any chance of navigating what is coming down the pike and what is already underway with the explosion that is modernity, it seems undeniable that intelligence is a valuable and necessary asset in figuring out how to survive, how to live. And yet, it also seems to be that this headlong collapse into unbridled rationalism is also the cause of so much of what horrifies us.

When you take these things together — the fact that religious or traditional worldviews are being very strangely vindicated by the frontiers of science and critical philosophy — but you also take note that people are rabidly afraid of taking religion seriously, I think that is a symptomatic knot of what is driving people so insane.

Nick Land: This is at a slight diagonal to what you’re saying — it’s definitely not just a translation of it — but we’re back on these strange loops and the fact that the most archaic forms of religiosity are found at the end. Time is not simply taking us away from those things. So I agree with that. But I think the diagonal is also a set of revisions to a lot of niche public conversations that have come, as far as I’m concerned, from Mencius Moldbug’s work. He’s mostly talking about religion, and he’s mostly talking about the fact that secularism is *cladistically* religious. It’s not that it has simply put

religion behind it; it's a particular type of development within a religious tradition. I see so many people say this that it's become difficult to attribute it to anyone in particular, but the claim that atheism, as it is generally understood in Western societies, is a particular variant of extreme Protestantism. It is not at all outside of it. It has not escaped our religious tradition, it's just the dominant phase of our religious tradition. I'm seeing lots of people beginning to move into this mode of analysis.

What is collapsing is a certain kind of extremely smug notion of transcendent secular rationalism, as if it's really looking at the world's cultures from outside and above, in some position of perfect neutrality — whereas instead, it's massively historically and culturally embedded, and it's looking out of its own very specific cladistic branch of cultural development at other parts of the planet's cultural shrubbery. It's not that that doesn't have roots; you could see the whole crisis that was visited upon the West by the introduction of comparative religion, where for the first time people couldn't help but see their own religious tradition as something that was relativised by these other religious cultures that were being discovered around the world. It obviously had a very corrosive cultural impact. But what's different about this is that it really is about losing the sense of transcendence completely.

There just simply are no perspectives that are not immanent to cultural history. Once that's taken seriously, then the notion that people have put certain religious problems behind them just begins to look very smug. It's a kind of smugness that is becoming increasingly fragile.

To loop this right back to what you were saying, that fragility is making people very bad-tempered. There's a wide sense in a lot of people that these very basic structures of sensibility are disintegrating. They're becoming unsustainable, and that makes people furious. They want to lash out at what they worry is a big challenge to it, or to things they think are somehow exhibiting less fragility, or as a way of demonstrating the fact that they still have remained in the same place, or for all kinds of reasons. When these basic belief structures enter into a crisis, it does produce this extreme atmosphere of vituperation and resentment that we're seeing on a huge scale.

Part 2: Blockchain, Critique, Time, Patchwork

[1:15:44] Nick Land: [The term] "Bitcoin" can be used safely as being the carrier of the blockchain. There are a couple of reasons for that. The first one is just network effects, or first-mover

advantage; it has installed itself. Part of its fascination is that it's an open-source protocol. Anybody can just take that code today and launch a Bitcoin 2, or whatever, that is absolutely indistinguishable from Bitcoin 1, except for the history. The history is everything: all our Bitcoin has is the fact that it's the first one. It has this first-mover advantage, this network effect. Why would you move from Bitcoin 1 to Bitcoin 2? The clone could be perfect, so there would be absolutely no reason not to, except for this mass accumulation of network effects that is already there with the first version of the thing.

Justin Murphy: *I just wanted to clarify whether or not you were remarking about specific features of Bitcoin relative to other cryptocurrencies, or if you're more generally talking about the properties of blockchain itself. It sounds like the latter.*

Nick Land: Both are really interesting. If you get into the discussion, then you would very quickly start talking about other instantiations of the blockchain, other altcoins and all of this, which definitely can't be just ignored or put aside. But if people are doing that in order to somehow dismiss the predominance or pre-eminence of Bitcoin, then I think that's a mistake. Insofar as this is a blockchain revolution, it is because Bitcoin is going to continue to feature very, very significantly in that.

Justin Murphy: *Maybe we could just dive in right away to the relationship between Bitcoin and philosophy, because I think that that very idea will confuse or surprise a lot of people. When people think about blockchain or Bitcoin, they think it's a very interesting and potentially very important financial technological innovation, but how on Earth could this have implications for philosophy? Maybe you could help us understand how you see the philosophical implications of Bitcoin. In some sense, that's what we'll be unpacking for the better part of this conversation, but just as a first jump into that question … How did you first make that connection in seeing philosophical implications here?*

Nick Land: There are two sides to this, from my point of view, that lock in the importance of the topic. One of them is already a sort of philosophically-freighted issue, but to a second order, and that is the fact that something like Bitcoin is baked into the modernist cake extremely deeply. The actual possibility of technically instantiating it relies on a set of incredible technical achievements having been made, but those achievements — that would be made one way or another — have been extremely predictable.

The whole tradition of spontaneous order, in the old sense, the liberal tradition of modernity —

notably passing through the Scottish Enlightenment and then through the Austrian School of Economics — had broad schemas for the technical and economic developments that it considers to be compelled by modern development, that really draw a profile of something very much like Bitcoin. If you look more recently into the computer and internet age, you see a lot of old texts about crypto-anarchy, about the way that anonymous internet transactions are going to impact on society, that obviously were formulated before anyone had actually worked out how to make a blockchain.

But at the same time, when you get the blockchain, you have this "aha moment" of saying, "This is what people were seeing. This is the actual realisation of something that people were only seeing in much more abstracted terms before that". That is, in the broad framework of political economy and political philosophy, Bitcoin is something that you recognise, when you see it, as having already been in play in a much longer tradition.

For the real, more crunchy, philosophical side, the argument I would strongly want to make is that there is a really powerful isomorphism between Bitcoin and critique in its Kantian sense. I'll run through that really quickly and then we can pick over it like vultures later. The main way this works is that the most abstract formulation of critique is something like, "objectivity should not be confused with an object". If you make that confusion, then you're doing metaphysics, and recognising the error of that move — of confusing objectivity with an object — is basically the whole of the critical enterprise.

There are probably several ways that that translates across into the technosphere, but I'll just reduce it to two. First of all, the internet itself. People know, in a broad socio-cultural and technological sense, the story of the internet and the fact that it begins from this series of strategic military imperatives for a robust communication system that would survive a nuclear exchange. The reason it would survive a nuclear exchange is because there are no indispensable nodes in the system. You can, to an arbitrary degree, take out important nodes in the internet — and of course, if you carry on doing that enough, you will finally eliminate the system — but the robustness of the internet is the fact that you have to work a long way down, taking out these hubs successively until you finally get to a point where the thing becomes dysfunctionally shredded. The further down you have to go to do that, the more powerful the internet is as a distributed system. And you get all the internet effects from that: the fact that it's relatively censorship-resistant, that it offers a lot of autonomy to low-level nodes, the fact that it can route around obstacles. On the internet, when you route around an obstacle, you emulate a hostile nuclear strike. You say, "I don't want to go past

this or that gatekeeper, and I will just assume that they have been vaporised by a foreign nuclear device and go around them some other way". There are always more of these other ways being brought on stream all the time.

So, with the internet, formulated in terms of critique, you make a metaphysical error if you misidentify the system with any node or group of nodes in the system. That's the isomorphism, the relation between objectivity and the object, or the media system and the nodes in that system. The internet is already a materialisation, a technological instantiation, of critique, and Bitcoin then builds on that and takes it to the next stage.

Satoshi Nakamoto is completely explicit in his kind of repeated mantra about Bitcoin that it's about bypassing trusted third parties. The trusted third party is in the role — in Bitcoin's realized-materialized thought space — that a central commanding hub would be in terms of the internet, or the supreme metaphysical error that these metaphysical objects are for pre-critical philosophy. Bitcoin is a critique of trusted third parties, that is deeply isomorphic with critique in its rigorous Kantian sense, and then with the historical-technological instantiation of critique. And that's why I think it's a philosophically rich topic.

Justin Murphy: *That was an excellent opening summary of how you see the philosophical implications. Maybe we could try to unpack it a little bit, because I think there's a lot of stuff there that's really fascinating but won't at all be obvious to a lot of listeners. One thing that I'm thinking about, listening to you give that summary, is whether or not the story that you tell which begins with modernity — and with a sort of modern tradition of philosophical critique — whether or not the process you're delineating really actually goes back to the beginning of time, as it were, in the sense that Bitcoin is a more perfect and formal realization of technological and economic dynamics of which the internet was an original kind of best shot, given the technological frontier at the time the internet appeared. But the internet was also really just the frontier manifestation of the same phenomenon that the printing press essentially was as well. And then further on down the line of historical time.*

In other words, especially relating what you're saying now to some of your other work, and some of the other ideas I think we both might be equally interested in about the nature of capital itself, and the nature of the long run of human history, or even life on this planet, seeing it as this kind of more or less continuous cybernetic evolutionary process, I wonder if there's a reason why you begin your discussion with modernity. Why could you not tell one continuous *story within the*

framework that you're presenting? Or could you?

[1:30:32] Nick Land: You're right that I would be reluctant to do that. I definitely think that modernity is a singularity, that there's a huge historical discontinuity involved in it. I can totally see that that is a controversial argument, and historians obviously treat it, I think, quite explicitly, as a controversial point. People will argue both ways on that. But at the crudest level of responses, it just seems to me, empirically, there is a sort of stark historical discontinuity that happens roughly in the Renaissance, where it really seems that something *new* has begun to happen.

Justin Murphy: *So basically, the thing that's new with modernity — it's very hard to pin down the primary variables, because it's a cluster of variables, as you've kind of indicated — the very idea of applying human rationality to traditional institutions and thinking about them critically, early capitalism, early technological innovations such as joint stock corporations and double entry bookkeeping … all of these are candidates for the key cause that sends modernity off into exponential takeoff, or singularity as you put it. But I think it's exceedingly difficult to try and pin down the primary variable among all of those variables, which was most importantly responsible for the takeoff that we call modernity. They seem to happen more or less in a self-reinforcing kind of cluster phenomenon.*

Nick Land: I'm tempted to make two quite disconnected remarks about it. One is the fact that the arrival of zero in Europe does strike me as overwhelmingly synchronized with the catalysis of modernity. Now, people obviously say, "Well, zero was around a long time. So what's so special about the arrival of zero in Europe?" I think that's a good and important question to ask, and it maybe then bounces us onto the other side of this …

Which is to say, this notion — which is still entirely contemporary and probably intensified right now in a way it's never been before — this notion of the route-around. I think it's utterly crucial to this. Once you really have robust route-arounds, you have this process in motion. So what you're trying to understand is "What is it that happened in Europe in the Renaissance with the arrival of zero that was different to what had happened in India?" I think it's quite clear that China had a functional notion of zero, it was obviously so prevalent in the Muslim world that people often call the numeracy "the Arabic numerals" — that was certainly how they were received by the West at the time — in none of those cultures do you get that same dynamic of escape. Modernity just isn't able to escape from the prevailing systems of social organization. There's something about the European situation — I would say it surely has to have, as one crucial component, the massive

amount of regime fragmentation that you find in Europe relative to these other cultures — that it was able to get out of the box in a way that was prevented in its other social contexts.

Justin Murphy: *So the way you see it is that, perhaps, for contingent, historical, institutional reasons, it's in Europe that something which human civilization, up until then had tried to contain — was able to, to some degree, contain — was able to get out of the box, as you put it, and you think that that is especially, uniquely, related to the arrival of zero in human mathematical capacities within Europe. You think that that was a profound qualitative rupture that allowed something to escape and something that we've really never been able to put back in the box since then?*

Nick Land: Yes, I would say that's exactly what I think.

Justin Murphy: *So maybe we could think a little bit about what exactly is that thing that escaped, because, I mean, I guess one plausible candidate would be, perhaps we just call this intelligence itself?*

Nick Land: The crucial notion is intelligence production. There's always been intelligence kicking around, but what is specifically modern is the fact that you're actually able to lock in a positive feedback circuit on intelligence production, and therefore, to have a runaway intelligenic process. This is something that is uniquely modern. Often when you're looking at the highest examples of intelligence in a culture, you're looking precisely at the way that it has been fixed and crystallized and immunized against that kind of runaway dynamic — the kind of loops involving technological and economic processes that allow intelligence to go into a self-amplifying circuit are quite deliberately constrained, often by the fact that the figure of the intellectual is, in a highly-coded way, separated from the kind of techno-social tinkering that could make those kind of circuits activate. And so what we're talking about with modernity, or capitalism, is the fact that the inhibitor system on that kind of circuitry becomes dysfunctional and ceases to obtain.

Justin Murphy: *What is unique about zero, you think, that kind of unlocks something? Why would the arrival of zero specifically be a candidate for the profound shift that occurs?*

Nick Land: The most striking thing about the explosion of modernity, in all of its dimensions, is it has this immensely mathematical character. When you're saying, "Has modernity erupted yet?", you're looking at the natural sciences, you're looking at the mathematicization of theories of nature, you're looking at business, you're looking at, obviously, the absolutely fabulous explosion of the systems of accountancy that were completely unprecedented in scale and complexity and

sophistication.

Before technology, similarly, it's to do with applied mathematics. And so, on one level, the arrival of zero in the culture is the arrival of a truly functional mathematics, just out of that arithmetical semiotic. And if you go back the other way, you can say, "Well, in the mirror, when we're talking about modernity as the singularity, we're actually engaged in a study of social control systems, dampening devices, inhibitors, a whole exotic flora and fauna of systems for the constraining of explosive dynamics. And it seems to me, clearly, in the Western case — what we can see retrospectively — one crucial inhibitor-mechanism was the radically defective nature of the arithmetical semiotic that was then dominant in the West. And so, again, we're really talking about a sort of negative phenomenon that zero just liquidates — a certain system of semiotic shielding, that is dampening down certain potential processes.

Justin Murphy: *The pre-modern worldview can be thought about as an artificially constrained scale of the relative values and magnitudes of things. This is perhaps most famously encoded in the notion of the Great Chain of Being. So if we just very crudely simplify the pre-modern worldview as this worldview in which everything has a place, everything has some sort of positive value, in other words, starting at zero, and going up to god, or something like that. So everything in the world, everything that's real, everything that exists, has some value greater than zero, in some sense. And those values are known, they're enforced by traditional authorities. And they even make a good deal of sense relative to human heuristics about what is valuable, and attractive, and what's not. And so, that can actually work fairly well in a limited way for some time.*

But what's interesting about that is you can see it as a kind of suppression of zero in some sense; what it's not quite able to intuit is that, in fact, the number line goes from negative infinity to positive infinity, and there is, smack dab in the middle of that, a unique quantitative value of zero that actually has no value whatsoever.

And the reason why I think that this way of thinking about it might be relevant or just useful heuristically is because it seems to me that part of the catastrophe of modernity, as it unfolds, especially for human experience, and our ability to process what's happening and to interact with each other in at all healthy and sustainable ways — there's this very peculiar symmetry or really chaotic, chaotically cycling nature to intelligence, where it really is kind of the basis of all good and the basis of much that people call evil. And I wonder if your idea about zero has something to do with this because, in some sense, you can think of the pre-modern worldview enforced by

traditional authorities as keeping a kind of forced lid on precisely that chaotic cycling around the zero point.

The liberation of mathematics is kind of the unmooring of rationality's ability to anchor itself ethically. It seems to me that the pre-modern traditions and especially the world religions, and perhaps I have in mind Catholicism in particular is, almost, you can really read it as precisely one dedicated solution to that very problem. Perhaps that's why zero is unique, if, in fact, your hypothesis is right, because it sort of makes possible this chaotically perverse symmetry around the number line, or something like that.

[1:45:10] Nick Land: Where you started off seems to me worth isolating in itself, because it's super convincing: this question just about the scale of available magnitude. It's obviously hugely characteristic of this transition of arithmetical semiotics. If you're using Roman numerals, every new magnitude has a letter. I mean, you'd run out of letters! They don't even use them all! Exactly as you say, the range of conceivable magnitudes would therefore be hugely constrained by that semiotic.

It clearly is a characteristically modern phenomenon to have this massive explosion in the range of conceivable magnitudes. And something that the semiotic obviously just pushes hard. It's a really reliable index of acceleration. The fact that we now talk about billions and trillions, quadrillions, that's very recent. You don't have to go back very far before "a billion" seemed like an almost preposterous number. The notion that you would just be throwing it into casual conversation, that it's something that's just marked on your memory chip, was totally inconceivable. I think that there's an imagined, to use your language, Great Chain of Being, that involves a relatively limited number of conceptually manageable magnitudes, marked fairly adequately by the letters of the Roman alphabet — and that is just blown to pieces into this screaming cosmic immensity that the new numbers open for us.

Justin Murphy: *I guess zero is also uniquely abstract, if you think about it, so it might have something to do with a certain opening onto abstraction.*

Nick Land: You can't say that strongly enough. It's the absolute definition of the absolutely abstract.

Justin Murphy: *At a certain point, our technologies for abstraction reach a breaking point where intelligence itself becomes auto productive, if I understood you correctly.*

Nick Land: That actually is closer to something like a Kurzweil-type historical model. And it's not

that I don't think there's much to that, but at the risk of being repetitive here, the thing I really want to emphasise when talking about what we mean by the pre-modern, is that we're talking about an entirely positive inhibitory apparatus. In the early stages of control engineering, of cybernetics, all the emphasis is on the inhibitory apparatus. The inhibitory apparatus is considered, into the mid-20th century, to be obviously what control engineering is about. The explosive element is systematically themed as pathological, dysfunctional, as disturbance, as some kind of social threat. That's why I'm slightly reluctant to see it translated as if there's this long-term trend struggling towards getting to takeoff point, as if the historical impetus is basically straining towards this explosive outcome, as if it finally arrives at the capacity for modernity. This is not a realistic model. I think it's rather that there is a regime failure that allows modernity to break out.

Justin Murphy: *That's an interesting distinction, definitely worth making. So you actually don't see the explosive dynamics of intelligence accumulation over time as a process that begins in the beginning of time.*

Nick Land: Yes, it has to be said that of course you only have a sophisticated, complicated inhibitory structure if there's something that you're inhibiting. In any complex information system — unquestionably throughout the history of life — there have been processes of positive cybernetic escape, and within those fields, appropriate systems of the production of an inhibitory apparatus. It's not that I'm wanting to say that that positive potential is something that only miraculously arrived in modernity. I think I'm quoting Deleuze and Guattari — where they say, it's the terror that has haunted the whole of history. When you're doing this concrete analysis of the actual machinery of a pre-modern regime, you're implicitly looking at the way that it prevents autocatalytic catastrophe happening under the conditions of that society.

Justin Murphy: *One of the things I think is really interesting about your work is the way that you really emphasize that critique, as we know it, is more or less the same thing, if I understand correctly, as capitalism itself.*

Nick Land: Yes, I think so. And absolutely as modern thought, modern philosophy.

Justin Murphy: *A lot of people today I think walk around with a kind of model in their heads in which rational critique and leftism are more or less synonymous. People think of, you know, Marx and the whole the entire tradition of criticizing capitalism as kind of the epitome of applying the human mind to social institutions. So a lot of people carry around this kind of natural presumption that rationality, and intelligent critique, is a kind of natural partner of creating social organizations and*

projects and institutions to make the irrationality of capitalism more rational, in some sense. Holding this line that you've held, and working on it, and tilling this ground, quite against the grain of what a lot of people's conventional wisdom is … is, I think, super useful now, because it seems to me that everyone's ideological codes are being scrambled, and if you kind of have this natural presumption in which we use our intelligence and rationality to criticize the stupidity and insanity of capitalism, that gets short circuited pretty badly when you look around. So I wonder if you could maybe try to back-out this idea a little bit more.

Nick Land: There's a lot of architecture in the history of philosophy that is basically putting this stuff into place. The largest recent shift is, again, the joint work of Deleuze and Guattari, where I think this fusion of the functioning of critique and the capitalist mechanism is brought together with huge intensity already very clearly. When you're reading their account of history, and their reading of Kant, they're exactly the same things. For them, the state is basically the ultimate metaphysical object. So everything we started with, in terms of this whole question of eliminating indispensable nodes, route-arounds — all of this kind of thing — plugs straight into that. The state is that historical element that presents itself as the Indispensable Node, the Great Hub, the Supreme Object — and in that way, it is actually the material and historical incarnation of metaphysics as a kind of materialized social problem, from the Deleuze-Guattari point of view.

Before that, in my graduate education, I was lucky to have some very smart Marxist teachers — I probably shouldn't name them because it probably wouldn't do them any favors if I did [laughs] — but the notion of a Kant-Capital complex was something that was totally in play for these people, already in the late 1980s, and far before that. That's just where I came across it. If that's the reference, then the dominant question about the overcoming of Kantianism is exactly the same, as a philosophical task, as the overcoming of capitalism, as a socio-political task. And I just want to say this was very explicit for them. It's not that that requires some kind of later interpretive overlay to make that kind of move.

As an appendix to that point, when you're talking about critique, and rationality, and these various notions that can obviously be quite nebulous — or they can be very philosophically rigorized — but I think if they're philosophically rigorized from a leftist perspective, then they're probably being rigorized in relation to this notion of what it would be to overcome Kant, and I don't think that Kantianism itself, except by the most extreme set of intellectual confusions, can be understood as an inherently counter-capitalist mode of intellectual or cultural process.

Justin Murphy: *Is it fair to say then, that in some sense, one of the reasons that blockchain is so fascinating is because it is this overcoming of Kantianism that is also an overcoming of capitalism — philosophy in practice? Is that how you see it?*

Nick Land: Well, that is how I would expect an articulate leftist to see it. I would not go that way at all. My position is that the stubborn vindication of Kantianism as the horizon of modern intelligence is the dominant phenomenon. I see blockchain as being Kantian. There's obviously some kind of updating that happens through the process of technical implementation, but there's nothing like the kind of overcoming that is seen in the history of German idealism leading into Marxism. I just don't see that kind of thing at all. I think that you've got a much more stubborn isomorphism between the actual mechanism of critique and the process of the blockchain.

Who knows what's down the road. But it certainly seems to me that it's an intensive transition in the autonomy of capital, which I think can be translated into the robustness of these route-around processes. So, while there is a deep leftist objection to the blockchain, which seems to be very rational and coherent and on point, there's the fact that it obviously is an escape route for capital, and that it makes a whole series of social projects based upon the domestication of capital become increasingly implausible.

[2:01:24] Justin Murphy: *While blockchain is clearly giving route-arounds for capital to escape, it's also undeniably on the side of liberation from control, right? So if you're against blockchain, if you want to suppress it and control it, and you generally see it as a bad thing, you can't also pretend you're interested in liberation from control structures. And I think that's a very valuable and quite attractive by-product of the way that these theoretical notions are getting manifested in the technology.*

Nick Land: I don't think I would disagree with that. But it just seems to me that what is seen as the libertarian potential of these technologies, and its capitalist potential, are more or less synonymous notions, and that the dominant sentiment on the left is that these things are bad, and a language of liberation is the way that capital masks its actual process — in a language of emancipation that, taken from a leftist his point of view, is profoundly inadequate. It's not sufficiently collective in its orientation and it's extremely cold in terms of any questions of amelioration of problems of social disadvantage and underdevelopment. So I don't see how anyone could disagree that there is a challenge to systems of control. I would have thought that the question is rather whether certain systems of control are actually required for the collectivization of emancipation, rather than it's

more Darwinian variants.

Justin Murphy: *Some things might surprise me that don't surprise you [laughs]. I guess perhaps the kernel of insight that was more promising in what I said is that it seems leftism — as that kind of sociological phenomenon that does still characterize the attitudes and behaviors of a fairly large number of human beings today — it still traffics in the connotations of liberation, and it seems to me that, a prediction that may emerge from this conversation about blockchain is that this will become increasingly less and less tenable as the technology becomes more widely distributed and it will become increasingly hard to deny that leftism is simply the break upon liberation in some sense.*

Nick Land: Yeah, that language, it's not that I've got any problem with it really, except it just sounds a little bit too triumphalist from the right. I do think, insofar as the language of liberation is about the ability to escape and route-around structures of control, then that is almost tautologically inevitable. I'm not really seeing a coherent objection. I'm not, as you know, the world's greatest sympathizer of the leftist political orientation, and so I tend to see the language of liberation in leftist rhetoric as often quite sophistical. I don't expect a lot of conceptual integrity from it. And I think the thing that blockchain is doing on this level, is that it just bypasses philosophical and political argument — people just simply do a route-around, it doesn't require some sort of collective affirmation at the barricades or any such thing. So it seems to me the rhetoric around that is very obviously secondary in a way that isn't true of a whole number of other socio-political projects, where the rhetoric and the political phenomenon are much more integrated.

Justin Murphy: *Could you say a little bit about how you think blockchain or Bitcoin affects our understanding of time, because I think you have some particular ideas about that?*

Nick Land: The whole of critique, and the whole of capitalism, can be translated into a discourse on time. Most famously the Heideggerian formulation of critique, that seems to me conservative in its essentials — that's to say I don't think it is a candidate for a post-Kantianism, but I think it's definitely enriching in the fact that it's quite clear about adding certain insightful formulations, and they tend to be time-oriented. The Heideggerian translation of the basic critical argument is that the metaphysical error is to understand time as something in time. So you translate this language, objectivity and objects, into the language of temporality and intra-temporality, and have equally plausible ability to construe the previous history of metaphysical philosophy in terms of what it is to to make an error. The basic error then, at this point, is to think of time as something in time.

So that's just to say that if it wasn't possible to make some point about Bitcoin and time it would be strange, having already said that Bitcoin is the highest level of technological instantiation of critique. There's also an obligation that comes with that: what is it saying about time?

And I guess my argument is that it's the first serious candidate that we have seen for artificial time. The context for that, that I think has drawn the most interest from people that I've had the opportunity to discuss this with, is really to do with Einsteinian relativistic physics, where the basic gesture that I want to make is a reactionary one, of saying there's a revival of this Kantian structure that had seemed to be destroyed. There's an extremely impressive, powerful, scientific case for the destruction of the autonomy of time from space — which seems to have been destroyed by the notion of general relativity. Minkowski space-time is where you get the clearest mathematical formulation of this new, modern take on that. The background to it is very tied up with the eclipse of Kantianism in the late 19th century/early 20th century, where it had seemed that Kant was incapable, due to his naive Euclideanism, of dealing with the new geometries introduced in the 19th century and their applications in physics that we see in 20th century.

There is an absolutely fascinating little exchange on a crypto mail board around the time that Bitcoin is actually being launched, and Satoshi Nakamoto, in that exchange says that the system of consensus that the blockchain is based upon — distributed consensus that then becomes known as the "Nakamoto consensus" — resolves a set of problems that include the priority of messages, global coordination, various problems that are exactly the problems that relativistic physics say are insoluble. In relativistic physics, between two sufficiently distant points in space, it's simply impossible to say which of two events comes first, the notion of simultaneity is lost, time order is lost. Instead, you have space-time coordinates — from a certain reference frame there's a certain ordering of events, but from another reference frame that ordering of events might be completely inverted. So, absolute Newtonian time is lost, Newtonian space is lost as well. But the blockchain simply cannot function …

Insofar as the blockchain functions at all, it's because that kind of relativistic structure does not obtain upon it. Were it the case that the space and time of the blockchain were modeled by relativistic physics, then what Nakamoto calls the double-spending problem would be insoluble. So what I'm wanting to argue is that the double-spending problem is exactly translatable into the kind of problems of classical physics that relativistic physics describes as insoluble. The equivalent of relativistic physics within the world of blockchain would be to say, "You cannot solve the double-spending problem". If we believe Einstein, and we believe it's translatable into the blockchain, then

the double-spending problem is insoluble, and since resolving the double-spending problem is the main thing that the blockchain does, there cannot be a blockchain. So the very existence of blockchains, in some fascinating way, shows that we cannot use Einsteinian physics when we're thinking about this world.

[2:16:17] Justin Murphy: *Okay, that's fascinating. So you think that blockchain basically surpasses the relativistic theory of physics?*

Nick Land: Well, I think you could easily end up saying really ridiculous things. So I would really like to be cautious about it. The minimal claim is to say that within the Einsteinian paradigm, the double-spending problem is insoluble. So how do we square this stuff? Obviously you don't want to say Einstein is wrong, and that Satoshi Nakamoto proves that. There are a whole bunch of inflated weird claims — that Bitcoin has overthrown modern physics — that could flow from this, and I think clearly have to be avoided.

So, what is the acceptably sober conclusion that is drawn from this? And I think I can say, with some confidence, that the blockchain preserves a distinction in type between space and time that is not Einsteinian. That therefore, if we say, "Well, what do we mean by time when physicists say that we've lost that notion?", I have to make a rejoinder in saying that we really still have time, that the blockchain tells us that we have time, and that we have time that is something totally different from space. And, in the structure of the blockchain, the difference between space and time is carried by the difference between the chain and blocks — every block is spatial when defined in terms of time, it's a unit of simultaneity. Everything which happens within a block in the blockchain has no differential duration, whereas blocks, when they're put together into the blockchain — the articulation of the blocks in the chain — is a time articulation, and it's time articulation in a Kantian sense. Irreducible temporality in the sense that it's not a spatial dimension.

So we still have space and time left. Well, how is it possible that we have space and time left? The answer to that is a technical theorization of this, that would be rigorously physical — it totally exceeds my competence in every way, but I'm able to see what it would look like. Bitcoin has a pulse, it has a tick, it has a set goal of the average time it takes to process a new block. (Well, I shouldn't say it's a tick, because it's not like a clock, it's not that it's set so you'll get a block every 10 minutes, it's that the parameters of the system are designed to hunt that, like a thermostat, and that's the equilibrium). So it has a model of the kind of regularity of these "ticks" and the difficulty of mining the block is adjustable and is fixed in order to keep it going at this rate that is considered

ideal, and that rate is a function of the spatial scope of the system, so it can establish a model of time.

It still is subject to cosmo-physics. So if I'm mining Bitcoin on Earth, and someone else is mining Bitcoin, even somewhere close, like Mars, then we still have a relativistic problem, potentially. And if you're going to have a blockchain, it must be that the metabolism of the blockchain considered, it's "tick", is sufficiently expansive for it to be able to absorb any relativistic distortion that happens due to the time lag of signals passing around in the system. Because, on Earth, the relativistic effects of large distances are pretty tiny — you're just talking about a fraction of a second probably — then even regular turnover of blocks is completely satisfactory, given the way the blockchain works — it chunks time into units of simultaneity called blocks, and then stacks the blocks in this absolutely fixed chronological order, and the magnitude of the blocks, measured in time, is quite adequate to maintain this artificial temporality under terrestrial conditions.

But were the blockchain to be fanned out deeper into the cosmos, then the block time would become larger and larger and larger and larger, and ultimately, would become impractical. So you'd be mining a block every six hours or something if you're just extending a blockchain into the inner solar system, or, if you go out into the outer solar system, then you need to have spent days for the system to tick forward and another block be added to the blockchain. So, I'm not saying that Einsteinian physics is wrong.

I'm saying that the blockchain is, in a substantial way, autonomous of the most extreme relativistic conclusions of that, because we do still have absolute time and the blockchain instantiates it. But Einsteinian physics put constraints on the blockchain, in that there has to be this relation between the regularity of block production and the spatial magnitude of the system. If you do then fan out beyond the Earth, they could become constraining, and this has the further implication that at astronomical scales you probably just have to have a plurality of blockchains. I don't think the notion of the blockchain scales up astronomically for Einsteinian reasons.

Justin Murphy: *I think that's incredibly fascinating. And I would probably need to listen to what you just said a few times before I fully grok it. I think I do basically understand you and I don't think that you're making overly inflated claims about physics. It sounds like what you're really just trying to say is that blockchain is able to technically instantiate something that one would think is not possible if one were thinking according to the relativistic physical model.*

Nick Land: Yes, I think so. The relativistic model itself has certain constraints in the fact that it

doesn't apply on small spatial scales, it does apply in theory, there are minute relativistic effects, but they're so minute that there's an absolutely rigorous, reliable technical fix to relativistic problems on small scales, and the blockchain does that fix, and therefore restores a notion of time that means we simply don't have to treat the foundations of critique, the Kantian foundations of critique, as having been obsolesced in this respect, we're under no intellectual obligation to do that.

Justin Murphy: *Without making any comments about Einstein or anything like that, it seems to me that we can say that blockchain is a system that supplies its own objectivity. Because the blockchain is this self-validating, trustless … it's like a technical prohibition on the possibility of lying. Once you have rational critique, and rational critique is out of the bag, and everyone's able to critique everything, you actually have some serious problems for the very possibility of rational critique, because everything becomes relative to everything else. And that's a quick and dirty way to summarize the cognitive unmooring that modernity represents. You could kind of understand that in a spatial metaphor, in the sense that in modernity, up until this point, we can create rational systems that are internally rational, but their relationship to other people, or figures, or spaces, is totally relative and arbitrary. And people can just tell lies, right?*

In the most quotidian sense, people can lie and get away with it in some part, because when they're caught out locally, they can just sort of move spatially, they can leave the area in which they're outed as liars, move spatially, and be liars somewhere else. And that spatial relativity — I only mean that in a metaphorical sense — seems to be a kind of basis upon which the cognitive chaos of modernity is possible, but if you're arguing that blockchain is artificial time, that in some non-trivial, meaningful sense is able to instantiate itself in a way that is not subject to the relativism that we might expect, then, does it not solve the spatial problem of lying and the cognitive disorientation that the current state of modernity could perhaps be described as?

Within blockchains you're going to have a perfect technical realization of objective truth and there's no routing around that within the blockchain. Now, you can have multiple blockchains, and this might result in something like a patchwork of blockchains, which is actually another avenue of conversation we could very well go down, but you're going to have perfectly objective internal systems and I just wonder is this not the perfection of critique into a state in which lying or spatial displacement becomes finally non-relative or impossible?

[2:30:53] Nick Land: I think that what you say about spatial displacement in relation to this question of lying — it's quite strongly analogous to what you then, quite rightly, end up with in terms of this

proliferation of distinct blockchains. Okay, I think this is something that has kind of haunted our discussion right from the start. And maybe we haven't brought it out very explicitly in terms of these questions about rationality and critique, in it's colloquial sense. There's no question that you've obviously been very interested in this thing about the ideological valence of this notion of critique, and how this applies to left and right.

In this context — let me test you to see to what degree you think that this is right — the difference at stake is between a model predominant on the left, which has to do with [the fact] that what is meant by reason is really the formation of an intellectual community or, you know, you start off with people who have a disparate series of assumptions or are drawing disparate conclusions or inferences, and the process of rationality is one that in a certain sense harmonizes that intellectual community. Whereas the model on the right is much more open to fragmentation and enduring disagreement and the operation of various kinds of selective processes to resolve the issue. And so obviously, the business corporation is the model of this, in the sense that you don't try and work out, in advance, as a society, what's the best way to run a business. You allow people to basically try almost anything that they want, and the businesses that work, work. And the ones that don't work, end up being liquidated. That selective process is the one that substitutes for the process and for the necessity of an intellectual community.

I don't know whether you think that way of articulating these differences is something that is convincing from your point of view. Maybe I should pause and see.

Justin Murphy: *Sure, yeah! I mean, I think it is a recurring theme perhaps, or recurring implication that I've had a sense of throughout my conversation with you, that it's almost as if technological acceleration is simply going to obviate almost all of the conceptual baggage that we use to try and figure out our political situation as human beings. In other words, we have these legacy categories such as left and right that are largely just by-products of certain technological inefficiencies. We need to aggregate decision making over time. We need to aggregate attitudes over time across large spaces. So certain concepts emerge to deal with the fact that we have faulty cognitive baggage, we have tendencies to all kinds of biases, we have this basic and faulty cognitive hardware that we operate on. And for most of modern political history and modern political theory, a lot of the categories that we use really are just quite inadequate, simplifying devices to deal with all of our faulty pieces of hardware, or something like that.*

But as the rationalization of that technology and the actual construction of technical hardware, or

technical systems (combination of hardware and software) — as the proficiency of that accelerates, we're just finding that almost all of our concepts are becoming no longer necessary, they just dissolve. There is just an immanent technical process that is occurring, and it becomes harder and harder to even make sense out of traditional modern political categories. That's a kind of thesis that, as I'm listening to you, I'm becoming perhaps a little bit more convinced of.

Nick Land: But then how do you make sense of the modern — when I say modern … let me say *contemporary* — political atmosphere, which seems to be becoming if anything more radicalized, more polarized, more heated in terms of the weight of these various kinds of markers of ideological affiliation? I mean, I'm assuming you don't see any hint of those things ceasing to obtain in that sort of terrain?

Justin Murphy: *Well no, not necessarily. In the short run, anyway. But isn't it sort of an implication of blockchain that capitalism, or the auto-development of systemic processes that generate value over time, that these are less and less in need of human beings at all in some sense? So once you can combine the idea of artificial intelligence with blockchain, it's just becoming increasingly easy to simply imagine a purely machinic capitalism in which surely non-carbon-based, intelligent machines basically have their own kind of global capitalism and increase value on their own over time, without any human beings even [being] on the planet. It's increasingly almost trivial to imagine capitalism carrying on through artificial intelligence and blockchain, as basically [with] every passing generation, human beings find it increasingly impossible to even survive, to the point that humans are completely bypassed. Is that how you see it, or not?*

Nick Land: Well, I think if we say *bypassed*, then definitely! I think there's a gradient of capital autonomization, and that what it is to be *advanced* in modernity is to be moving *up* that gradient. So, autonomous machines are the index that is used to say "how modern is this?" So, yes, I do agree.

But in terms of how that will play out ideologically … I don't know whether you saw it, it was passed around Twitter quite a lot, that article in *The New Statesman* by an English politician, I think he's called [Jon Cruddas] or something like that, about accelerationism. What he was basically doing — I mean, I only read it once, and fast, but it seems to me his basic thing was to say, "Look, accelerationism is inherently anti-humanist, even in its left-wing variants it simply can't shake that, that's just essential to it in a way that's irreducible" and — even though maybe this was more implicit in his argument — it seemed to me he was saying, "For this reason the left cannot use this

stuff, *really*, the left has to align itself with a kind of new humanist resistance to these dehumanizing, autonomizing technological processes." Now, that seems to me very plausible.

If I was asking what is going to happen to the left, I think it's going to become increasingly and explicitly and *fiercely* humanist in orientation. So nonchalance about the dehumanizing tendency of these processes, I think, will be seen as a marker of right-wing ideological affinity.

Justin Murphy: *Right. I think that that's a very reasonable prediction, and in large part that basically characterizes what seems to be happening right now. So I think you're on point. I would only add to that at least one alternative possibility. And I should say very clearly, I'm not necessarily predicting [anything]. I'm really just kind of riffing and speculating about possibilities, and also indicating what I think is perhaps the most attractive line of thought for people today who are interested in radical philosophy and thinking as critically as possible about the human predicament at this point in time.*

Especially for people from a left-wing perspective — and that the traditional modern coordinates of which are being rapidly destroyed. But if you do still have an interest in the left-wing tradition, personally, I think the most exciting lines of thought have to do with leveraging blockchain, to be honest. And I'm especially interested in potentially connecting blockchain to these ideas of patchwork because [those are], in my view, the most honest and intelligent positions for serious intellectual projects with a left-wing flavor. In other words, people who are still interested in the idea of building radical liberatory communities that are in some part insulated or that transcend the drudgery and aggressiveness that's associated with market discipline.

It seems to me that if you're really into that, and you think that there's a way to organize life like that, that it is superior — and also, in engineering terms — possible and empirically serious, then we should be able to build a patch. Leveraging the most state-of-the-art technical possibilities to make something like communism a superior form of living that would actually function better than current forms of economic and political organization … And I'm actually fairly confident … I wouldn't put the probability of achieving that very high, but I would probably put it much higher than most people who are thinking about this sort of stuff in any kind of mature or serious way. I actually think that it's quite imaginable that a kind of communist patch, if organized correctly, would actually outperform and outcompete more reactionary-flavored patches.

But I'm also aware that we've been talking for quite a while. And I didn't mean to just put a huge provocation on the table an hour and 40 minutes in …

[2:45:13] Nick Land: No, no, that's all good! My position on what you've just said is, I totally welcome this tendency. Obviously, from outside. I mean, I'm profoundly skeptical about the prospects of these, as you say — I think in the most extreme way of describing it — a *communist patch*. You know, I'm not going to be *investing* in them, but I entirely support the project. And it seems to me that there's a left lineage that should be tightly unobjectionable to the "liberal" (in the old sense) tradition of capitalistic modernity, which is the tradition of experimental communes, of experimental cooperative organized businesses, and now, as you say, of experimental left-flavored blockchain innovation. I just, I don't think there is any legitimate basis for a right-wing critique of such things being undertaken. There is of course much, much room for right-wing *skepticism* about their chances of success, but that seems to be a isolable and irrelevant issue. Because I'm assuming you don't need right-wing endorsement of these things. At that level you simply need social permission, and I would of course hope that social permission will be there, and be ever easier to find for this kind of thing.

Justin Murphy: *It's ironic but if there's a social permission problem, it's coming from the left. And that's just so bizarre, and that can explain for you why I'm so obsessed with trying to unwind these strange ideological loops.*

I know it's late for you. And I know we've been talking for some time now. But it's actually quite a natural segue since you invoked social permission …

Maybe you could reflect a little bit or maybe share some of your insights from your experience becoming, in a lot of people's eyes, quite a pariah figure. Something I've always been very curious about is, when you first started getting a lot of condemnation, especially from the left, in England and in the West … I'm very curious. Were you even surprised how much condemnation was generated? Or had you already factored that into your model of the world? In other words, you were quite conscious of the provocations you were making and the effects that it would have, or you were stunned at how offended people were by some of your ideas?

Nick Land: The model was precisely predicting the level of condemnation that arose. The phase of my activity that has generated the most *thermonuclear* hostility is obviously based on my encounter with Mencius Moldbug, and particularly, with his basic model of what we're dealing with — what he calls the Cathedral. The state church of the supposedly secular West. And that state church engages in entirely traditional modes of cultural policing, based upon zealous extirpation of heresy. All you need to know is what the significant heresies of the state church that you're

concerned with are, and then those responses are as predictable as the results from a particle accelerator given a good standard model of the nature of subatomic interactions.

I mean, it is completely unsurprising and, in fact, if surprising, surprising only in that they are so completely and unironically falling into the pattern predicted by their enemies. The tragedy of the left — as I've seen it, really, in the last five years — is the fact that it lacks any sense of what it looks like outside its own framework, and the fact that it does seem to be so entirely predictable in its set of responses.

Justin Murphy: *Your model of the world had already been updated, such that you knew saying the things you wanted to say was going to trigger quite a lot of outrage. But in some sense, you were willing to do that precisely because your model of the world was such that you had really nothing to lose?*

Nick Land: No … That condemnation was extremely valuable *scientific* confirmation, as far as I was concerned, of the validity of the Moldbug thesis, and it played a large role in consolidating it. Now, if nothing like that had happened, I would have probably had to just dump Moldbug in the trash and say, you know, "nice theory" but clearly the world doesn't work like that.

Justin Murphy: *It's as though, if you actually want to try and figure out the left-wing project, your number one immediate enemy is all the people on the left today. Or at least, let's say, the people who occupy the word and the associated vocabulary of leftism as a kind of recognized manifestation. These legacy concepts are just so overheated that they really don't make that much sense anymore …*

Nick Land: I think you can overdo historical analogy to some extent, but because modernity *is* a coherent — it's cross-cut by all kinds of randomness and complexity and discontinuities, but ultimately — it's a *coherent* process, and I think it supports to a considerable extent criss-cross historical analogies within the history of modernity (we've made lots [of this], and probably this is more my voice, more my *vice* than yours, over the course of this conversation), and the one I think is just hugely, hugely relevant (and maybe we even talked about it last time we were talking, because it is so attractive to me) is the earliest stages of modernity and the processes of Reformation; and the interaction of this revolutionary new media system based on the printing press, and the traditions of church authority. And I think we're seeing exactly the same thing. I think it fits extremely well with what you've just said.

I think that there is a *church*. It's quite coherent, it has a very definite sense of orthodoxy and heresy. We know it does, we can argue about how fragmented or pluralistic or whatever society is, but you will get this language from the left (which is what I will continue to call it here). And that is based upon the fact that any "decent", "acceptable" person will subscribe to *this* belief, and *this [other]* belief is completely unacceptable — it should be no-platformed, suppressed, maybe you even should be imprisoned for the voicing of certain extremely heretical opinions. So, of course, it is a coherent cultural entity. We can see! If it was not a coherent cultural entity, it could not possibly have any belief in its capacity for doctrinal policing. And we see that it has this confidence of doctrinal policing all the time. It's just … we're being bombarded with it.

The dominant ideological phenomenon of our age is the crisis of — I would use Moldbug's language — Cathedral doctrinal policing. And, of course, that crisis is being driven by new media technologies that I think are completely unstoppable. And I think that the Cathedral in its modern form has roughly the same prospects that the notion of a universal authoritative Catholic Church had in early modern Europe: none. There's going to be wars of religion, heretical thinking is not going to be suppressible. There are questions about how much and what intensity of violence and conflict and failed policing operations will be required, but at the end of the day the media system — the technological and media system — dictates that there has to be a retrenchment on the part of the established church into a more realistic, defensible position: enclaves, partitions of various kinds, zones of sovereignties that are based upon an acceptance of fragmentation and diversity, and differential regime structures that as yet are not accepted. But I have absolute confidence that that's the trend that were involved in.

Justin Murphy: *Well, Nick, I think I'm gonna let you have the last word on that one. Because, I mean, I could talk with you much longer about many more things, but I'm conscious that it's late there, and I really don't want to overtax you, so you gotta draw the line somewhere, and I think I should let you off here.*

Nick Land: Okay, that's great. That's really… This has been great fun, Justin. Best of luck. I would even go as far as "best of luck" with your communist blockchain, as long as you're not looking for an investment.